NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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NICK CARTER FORGING THE FETTERS

OR, THE OUTWITTING OF A CLEVER VILLAIN

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"

NINA AND HER BROTHER FELL BACK FROM THE TRAPDOOR, BUT THE REVOLVER OF NICK CARTER COVERED THEM.

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NICK CARTER FORGING THE FETTERS;

OR,

The Outwitting of a Clever Villain.

By the author of "NICHOLAS CARTER."

CHAPTER I.

THE TYPEWRITER'S SECRET.

It was exactly ten o'clock at night when Miss Kittie Payson, typewriter and confidential clerk to Henry Wilbur, lawyer, rested from her work and put away the sheets she had filled with legal sentences.

She had worked hard that day.

"I won't have to rattle the machine to-morrow, for that is to be my holiday," she said aloud.

Mr. Wilbur was out of the city.

Before going, he had told the girl, whom he seemed to trust in every way, that when she had completed certain work she might take a holiday awaiting his return.

This was just what Kitty Payson wanted, and, of course, she thanked her employer for his kindness.

The office was in a large building not far from Broadway.

It went by the name of The Rookery, because it was honeycombed with offices of various kinds and had some queer characters in it.

Just across the hall from the lawyer's door, for instance, was a man of whom no one seemed to know anything.

The inscription on his door read:

"L. E. Wicks' Estate; Frederick Marvin, Administrator."

Old Mr. Marvin had very few callers.

If the estate of the deceased Mr. Wicks ever amounted to very much it had certainly diminished in value.

At any rate, that was the general opinion among the tenants.

So little notice did he attract that if any one had asked Kitty Payson to describe him she could not have done it.

Indeed, she hardly knew what he looked like.

On this particular night Henry Wilbur's pretty typewriter noted the time as she went to leave the office.

Passing out into the hall, she glanced toward old Marvin's door.

A dim light shone over the transom.

This was nothing unusual.

She had seen it forty times before, and had never thought much about it.

On the sidewalk she stopped a moment to rebutton one of her gloves.

In another moment she was going home, with her face lowered to the wind that blew down the street.

Suddenly she stopped.

"I believe I forgot to lock the door," she said. "Yes, I am sure I did. How provoking! I must go back and lock it."

Kitty turned and started back.

She was near the building when a man came out of the open hall which led to the stairway.

She saw him coming toward her.

His hat was drawn over his face, but it did not entirely hide a pair of keen, black eyes. He also wore a heavy beard.

They met and passed.

Kitty Payson took but little notice of the man.

She took him to be one of the many tenants of The Rookery.

Later on she was destined to recall the incident vividly.

She ran upstairs to the lawyer's room, and to her chagrin found that she had locked the door.

"This is provoking!" she exclaimed. "Here I have come back to try a door already fastened. What have I been thinking about this evening?"

She went down the stairs again.

Twenty minutes later Henry Wilbur's typewriter was at home.

She was a girl with but few acquaintances.

She went out a little, but had never learned much about the ways of the great city.

Tired out with her long day's work and anxious to get some sleep for her holiday, she retired at once.

She awoke earlier than usual the next morning.

Suddenly, as she was dressing, she was startled by the cry of a newsboy.

"Yere's yer mornin' papers. All about de murder in de Rookery!"

The murder in The Rookery?

Kitty dropped the brush with which she was brushing her hair and ran to the window.

Her heart was in her throat and her face was pale.

She seemed to feel the pallor.

The boy was across the street.

Throwing a wrap over her shoulders, she opened the window.

"Here, boy. What's that in the papers?" she called, in a voice that trembled.

"Murder in de Rookery. All about it, miss."

"In The Rookery? Do you mean——"

"Can't tell you all what's in the paper," broke in the boy. "I guess youse kin read. Here's yer——"

"Give me a *Herald*," said Kitty.

Her room was on the second floor.

The boy bunched a paper and dexterously threw it up to her.

Tossing him a nickel, she told him to keep the change.

Then the girl closed the window and drew back.

Some one killed in The Rookery?

The thought was dreadful.

It did not take her long to find the news.

The moment she saw the headlines she felt faint and sank back into a chair.

"It is old Marvin!" she cried. "How terrible! Who could have done it? Ah, that man——"

She stopped to read the account.

Little had been learned.

The old man had been found on the floor of his room by the janitor.

A knife had penetrated his heart.

This showed that it had been wielded by a determined hand and that the murderer knew just where to strike.

No clew had been found to indicate who the murderer was.

Nothing was said about the man in the slouch hat the typewriter had seen.

Faint from the shock of the news, Kitty arose nervously to her feet and approached the bureau.

The first thing to do was to finish dressing.

At this moment she caught sight of something white lying close to the door.

It was a letter.

Some one had evidently pushed it under the door during the night.

Kitty stepped forward and picked it up with a fear of impending danger.

She looked at the inscription.

It contained simply her name, but in a hand she did not remember ever to have seen before.

She cut off the end of the envelope with her scissors and took out the missive.

It was brief, but it drove every vestige of color from the girl's face.

Here is what she read:

"MISS KITTY PAYSON: A silent tongue insures safety. A secret well kept hurts no one. If you know what is best for you, you will say nothing.

"ONE WHO KNOWS."

That was all, but it was enough.

She knew instantly that the letter came from the man with the black eyes.

It meant that if she breathed one word of her adventure the night of The Rookery murder something serious would befall her.

No wonder she trembled and let the note fall from her hands.

She looked up expecting to see the writer of the letter in the doorway.

Of course, no one was there.

Then she read the note again, but with more care.

This time she looked at the formation of the letters.

An unknown hand had traced them.

It looked a little like a woman's handwriting, but she would have sworn it was a man she saw the night before.

"What shall I do?" the frightened girl asked herself. "Shall I burn it? I wonder who brought it to the house and how he got in? Does the landlady know? I dare not ask her even."

The girl did not burn the letter.

She opened her trunk and buried it in the darkest corner.

This done, she breathed more easily, but still the implied threat in the note paled her cheeks.

She was fully dressed when a rap sounded on her door.

If she had received an electric shock she could not have been more startled.

She attempted to ask who it was, but her tongue could not utter a sound.

Gathering together all her courage, she unlocked the door.

Opening it, she staggered back with a cry.

Nick Carter stood before her!

CHAPTER II.

THE CRIME OF THE ROOKERY.

Two hours after Kitty Payson had left The Rookery the janitor started to go through the building to see that everything was safe for the night.

Israel Hobart had been doing this for years.

Although he had had some singular adventures in The Rookery, there had never been a crime committed within its walls.

He came down the hallway that led to Frederick Marvin's door.

He tried every door, for that was part of his business.

When he reached Marvin's office he was surprised to find the door ajar.

The next moment he had poked his head inside.

A light was burning in the room, but it had been turned low by design.

Israel Hobart never had much of an acquaintance with old man Marvin, but they had met occasionally, and even exchanged a few commonplace words.

It was singular that the old man's door should stand ajar at that hour of the night.

The janitor stepped inside to see if anything out of the way had happened to him.

The sight that caught his gaze sent him backward with a start.

The body of the old man was stretched on the floor near his armchair.

The arms were outstretched and the hands appeared to be clutching at the hard floor beneath them.

The janitor turned up the light.

Then, stooping over the body, it took but a glance to see the old man was dead.

There was a dark stain on the carpet where blood had oozed from the fatal wound.

He sent a swift glance around the room.

"Nothing seems to be disturbed," he muttered. "This is a case for the detectives, and I know the man who will ferret it out if any one can."

Arising quickly to his feet, he passed out of the room, closing and locking the door behind him.

In another minute the janitor was on the street, hurrying to the office of the greatest detective this country has ever seen, Nick Carter.

When he returned he was not alone.

The man who came with him was Nick Carter himself.

They entered the building together, and the janitor led the way to old Marvin's room.

"Now, Hobart," said Nick, "if you will leave me here a little while, I should like it."

"You can have the room to yourself till daylight, if you wish," was the reply.

"Thank you, Hobart. I shan't take that long. Come back in ten minutes."

With this the janitor went up to his own apartments.

Shut up in the room with the dead, Nick Carter began his investigation.

The janitor had told him that Marvin was a queer man who had few, if any, callers.

It took Nick, however, but an instant to decide that this night, at least, he had had a caller who had left his mark.

The old man had apparently been killed by some one who approached him from behind.

How the visitor got in was the next question.

Turning to the door, Nick saw a key was in the lock on the inside.

Hanging to it was a keyring and a number of other keys.

The detective quickly satisfied himself that these belonged to the dead man.

This circumstance indicated two things—that old Marvin had locked the door behind him on entering his office, and that whoever it was who took advantage of him had not unlocked the door from the outside.

There were also no signs to show that the door had been forced open.

Nick, therefore, became convinced that the murderer had entered the room with Marvin's knowledge.

He now went to the little, old-fashioned desk which Marvin kept in one corner of the room.

He opened it with one of the keys on the keyring and began to ransack it.

It was evident the murderer had not stopped to look into the desk, for everything was orderly and showed no signs of having been recently looked over.

There were receipts for payments of rent and a few other things.

The detective was about to close the desk when he caught sight of something that looked like the beginning of a letter.

He picked it up and went to the light with it.

Sure enough, it was a letter just begun and thrown aside as if the wording had not pleased the writer.

It was an invitation for some one to call on him.

"'I shall be in my office to-morrow night, and can see you any time after nine,'" read the detective. "'Please don't bring any one with you, for you know I don't like——'"

The writer had stopped here and thrown the writing into the desk.

The date of the half-finished letter showed that it had been penned the day before, and the hour set for the visit was strikingly near the hour when the tragedy must have occurred.

Nick Carter put the paper in his pocket and buttoned his coat over it.

"The person to whom this letter was written evidently came," he remarked, dryly.

He now spent some time searching through the rest of the room, but there was nothing more he could discover.

By the time he got through the ten minutes were up and the janitor returned.

"Who occupies the room right across from the old man?" asked Nick.

"Henry Wilbur," replied Hobart.

"What is he?"

"A lawyer, sir—and—by the way——"

"Well?"

"His typewriter was working rather late to-night. I don't think she went home till about ten."

Nick was taking one last glance around the room, but at the janitor's words he looked up quickly.

"Indeed! Did you see her go?" he asked, and he eyed the janitor keenly.

"No, but I heard her close and lock the door and my wife glanced out of the window as she started up the street."

"What is her name?"

"Payson—Kitty Payson."

"Where does she live?"

"I don't know."

"All right, Hobart," said Nick. "The next thing to do is to sound the alarm. You know where to go."

"Shall I tell them that you have been here?"

"Who knows that you went for me?"

"No one."

"Didn't you tell your family?"

"I did not, and I haven't told them yet. They were all asleep when I went up just now, and, anyway, women can't keep secrets."

"Then keep the secret yourself for the present, Hobart," said Nick, smiling at the janitor's opinion of women. "Wait till I am gone and then you may go and tell Officer Kipps. You know where to find Kipps?"

"That I do. I've known where to find him for ten years."

The detective went down the stairway and out into the street.

The janitor waited a while and then followed him.

"I'll find Kipps and let him get his name into the papers," he chuckled to himself.

Five minutes later a fat policeman puffed up the stairs, and, guided by Israel Hobart, discovered the dead body of Frederick Marvin on the floor of his little room.

And this was the way the murder got to the public.

Officer Kipps told it at the police station, other officers came, and, of course, the morning newspapers were in time to get a full account of it.

CHAPTER III.

THE THIEF.

When Kitty Payson opened the door of her room and saw Nick Carter standing before her she did not have the slightest idea who he was.

But the sight of a stranger appearing there so soon after the shock caused by the tragedy was too much for her overwrought nerves.

That it was not the man she had met near The Rookery and the probable author of the threatening note she could see at a glance.

Besides, there was something about the visitor that seemed to reassure her.

Recovering herself quickly, she was about to speak, when he asked:

"Miss Payson?"

"I am Miss Payson," answered the girl.

"I beg your pardon for intruding on you," said the detective, "but the matter I wish to see you about is too important to be discussed before others. I am Nick Carter, the detective."

If the girl had recovered from her first surprise, she was not prepared for this one.

Once more her cheeks blanched.

If she had been guilty of the murder herself, she could not have acted in a more suspicious manner.

Nick saw her confusion and said:

"Pray do not be alarmed. I have simply a few unimportant questions to ask you and then I shall not trouble you again."

As he spoke he shut the door behind him.

"You are employed in an office in The Rookery, are you not?" asked Nick, as he seated himself near the window, after drawing up a chair for the typewriter.

"Yes, sir," replied the girl, nervously.

"You were at work last night, were you not?"

"I was there working past hours, but I came out when I was through, and I don't know anything about the murder of old Mr. Marvin, and——"

"Oh, you don't?" laughed Nick. "Why, how did you know I was going to ask you anything about that?"

In spite of herself, she was growing calmer under the man's kindly glance.

"Well," continued Nick, "you struck it right, at any rate, for that is just what I came here to see you about. But you say you saw nothing out of the way when you left The Rookery?"

The girl thought of the man she had seen come out of the building, but said nothing about him.

"No, sir. I saw nothing out of the way."

"Was there a light in the old man's room when you left the office?"

"I remember seeing a light there."

"And all was still inside?"

"Everything was still there."

"Have you seen Mr. Marvin have any callers of late?"

"No, sir."

"You don't know, then, if any people came to see him?"

"I do not."

This was true, for she had never seen any one enter old Mr. Marvin's office.

Nick Carter asked the girl a few more questions and then, apparently satisfied, he took his departure.

When he was by himself, however, a curious smile played about his mouth.

"I'm inclined to think," mused the detective, "that Miss Kitty Payson knows more than she has told me. We will see what Patsy can do with her."

And he proceeded to his office.

Both Chick and Patsy, his assistants, were out.

Leaving word for Chick to wait for him and for Patsy to follow the directions he left, Nick again visited the room of the crime.

But he came as one who had not been there before.

The body had been removed to an undertaker's.

Israel Hobart, the janitor, had kept the secret well, and he now stood in the apartment with the broad light of day streaming into it.

Nick heard a good many comments about the murder.

One tall man who made his way up the stairs and into the room said it looked to him like suicide.

"But old Marvin was struck from behind," said some one.

"He was, eh? Well, I once knew a man who held a dagger against the wall and deliberately fell backward against it."

Nick Carter smiled.

There was something about the man's manner that interested him.

The detective noticed that he wore a heavy beard, while his upper lip was cleanly shaven.

Nick Carter's detective instinct never errred.

In this case he felt strangely impelled to watch the man.

He heard him make a few inquiries as to whether any clews had been discovered.

When he was told that the police had absolutely nothing to work on, Nick thought he noticed the slightest look of relief pass over his face.

When the man left he took pains to look around to see if any one were watching him.

Apparently, the attention of all was taken up elsewhere.

Yet one pair of eyes watched him reach the street and turn rapidly into Broadway.

Nick Carter had determined to keep his man in view.

The detective followed him as far as Canal Street, where the stranger turned to the east.

Presently he was nearing the Italian quarter, better known as "Little Italy."

Nick saw him proceed a short distance up Mulberry Street and then he suddenly disappeared.

The detective blinked his eyes and looked again.

There was no sign anywhere of the man he had followed.

"That means there's something doing," muttered the detective. "In that case we will take a closer view."

Retracing his steps for a short distance, he dodged into the hallway of a large tenement house.

Then he made one of those rapid changes that have given him the name of the quickest lightning-change artist living.

When he appeared on the street again he was a first-class "Dago."

He was without collar or necktie, and his torn coat showed his occupation to be a rough one.

In short, he looked like an ordinary laborer such as is at work on our underground railroad, now in course of construction.

Reaching the point where he had last seen his man, Nick Carter noticed that he was in front of a flight of stone steps.

This undoubtedly was the way by which the stranger had disappeared.

Passing down the steps, Nick opened a door which led him into a small room.

There was no one there to dispute his passage.

He glided across the room and then into another.

Some one was in the room beyond him.

Suddenly the door opened and he saw a light in the hand of an old Italian woman.

In an instant the detective hugged the wall and watched the woman as she came forward.

She did not see him, but crossed the room.

As she reached the wall, Nick was astonished to see her touch a little button.

Instantly a door set in the wall sprang open.

She ran her hand into the niche and drew something out.

Clutching it, she retraced her steps and left the room again.

Nick now crept toward the door.

There was a transom over it.

By stepping on the baseboard and holding on to the woodwork on one side of the door, he was able to peer within.

The sight that met Nick's eyes caused him to start back.

Seated at a table in the room were two persons.

One was the woman he had just seen.

The other was the tall stranger he had followed from The Rookery.

If Nick had suspected the man before, his suspicions were increased ten-fold by the present situation.

On the table before them were some old documents which the woman was examining nervously.

It was evident she was looking for something she could not find.

"Well, it doesn't seem to be there, Valencia," said the man, with a slight sneer.

"I'm sure I have it," returned the woman. "Old Marvin gave it to me himself."

"And you say you will turn it over to the reporters unless I give you one hundred dollars?" asked the man, who was watching the woman like a hawk.

He looked as if he would like to spring over the table and choke her to death.

She stood his glance without flinching, and answered:

"That is exactly what I mean. You won't dare admit that I am old Marvin's widow. While he lived I promised not to use his confession, but now that he lies dead, I think I hold the whip hand over you."

"That's all very nice, but I told you I should not pay you a cent until you gave me this confession."

"All right, then, don't do it," and the Italian woman arose and stood erect.

Nick was surprised to note how well she spoke English.

She was evidently a person of some education, despite her shabby appearance.

"Don't do it," she went on. "I'll show you whether

I have those papers or not. It would make mighty interesting reading to the public just now."

The tall stranger thought a moment.

"Can you find that confession by to-night?" he asked, and Nick could see that his manner had changed.

"Of course I can."

"Then I think you may look for me, and as you may need the loan you want in the meantime, I guess I will let you have it."

He leaned back and pulled a roll of bills out of his pocket.

Her eyes glittered as he counted out one hundred dollars.

"I don't give you this because I consider it blackmail," he said. "I knew you once when times were flourishing for you, but now that you are in want I am willing to help the wife of an old friend."

Nick drew back his head from the transom, feeling that the man was about to leave.

Suddenly, however, he heard a noise behind him.

Turning like a flash, he beheld a woman standing there regarding him.

He saw she was frightened at seeing him.

"Who are you? And why are you here?" she said, in a voice loud enough to be heard easily in the adjoining apartment.

Nick heard a scrambling in the room behind him and knew he had not an instant to lose.

He brushed by the woman and ran into the next room, shutting the door behind him.

Without stopping he dashed on.

Springing up the stone steps, he regained the street and dodged into the first vacant doorway he came to.

Then his manner changed instantly.

He lounged against the doorway as if he had been standing there at least an hour.

A half-filled pipe was lighted, and he puffed away leisurely at it.

Presently he saw a number of Italians running toward the stone steps.

Several women were talking excitedly and making wild gesticulations.

It seemed a thief had been discovered in one of the tenant's rooms.

CHAPTER IV.

PATSY'S DELICATE GAME.

Early that afternoon, as soon as Patsy had received Nick Carter's instructions, he set out for the home of Miss Kitty Payson.

The news of the murder and the subsequent events had so upset that young lady that she was in no frame of mind to enjoy her proposed holiday.

She had, therefore, given it up.

The young detective was admitted to her rooms and he immediately made himself known.

Nick had given him the net results of his own interview with the typewriter.

He had told Patsy that the girl was holding something back, which it was up to him to find out.

It was hard for the pretty typewriter to believe that Patsy was a detective.

His frank, boyish face seemed to indicate that he was some young student or clerk rather than the trusted aide of Nick Carter himself.

Before she knew it she found herself talking about her affairs as if she had always known the young detective.

This is just what he was working to have her do.

She told Patsy, among other things, that she had just received a note from Mr. Wilbur, saying he would be away several days.

"There's no use asking me anything more," she said, at last, "because I shan't tell you another thing."

"Then you admit that you are holding back something concerning the murder?"

The girl bit her lip as she realized the slip she had made.

She arose hastily from her chair and looked out of the window.

The next instant she drew back with a cry of fright.

Patsy sprang to her side to catch her.

Then his glance followed hers out of the window.

On the opposite side of the street a rather tall man, with a slouch hat drawn down over his eyes, turned from where he was standing and strode rapidly down the street.

"Who is that man?" asked Patsy, sharply.

"I—don't—know," stammered the girl, in confusion.

"Why were you so startled, then?" he asked.

"Because—because he was looking straight over here," she answered, at last.

Patsy saw he could learn nothing more from her, and was soon hurrying back to the office.

Chick was within, waiting for his chief.

"Hasn't the boss returned yet?" asked Patsy, eagerly.

"Not yet, boy. Anything on your mind?"

"Just a trifle. Say, Chick, can you give me ten minutes' help?"

"Sure thing. What's the racket?"

"I'm going to try the girl make-up again. I want you to make me a brunette this time."

Patsy could disguise himself capitally as a girl, and with Chick to put on the finishing touches, his disguise was practically impenetrable.

The young detective had closely studied Miss Payson's form and features during his interview with her.

He and Chick were in the midst of their work when Nick Carter entered.

He at once approved Patsy's plan and gave one or two touches himself to the disguise.

When the young detective started out again with a trailing skirt, carrying a parasol and gloves, even Nick smiled with approval at his perfect take-off of the pretty typewriter.

Patsy made his way back to a point not far from Miss Payson's boarding house.

It was growing late in the afternoon now and the light was beginning to fade.

After watching the boarding house for a few minutes, he saw the door open.

Miss Payson came out.

She was attired in a simple black dress, as when he had called on her.

He had used almost the same material for the dress he wore.

Watching her go up the street, he saw her stop at the corner.

Presently a Lexington Avenue electric car came along, which she hailed and boarded.

"Good! Things are coming my way," chuckled Patsy, as he made his way around by another street to the point where he had last seen Miss Payson.

Waiting until a car from the other direction stopped and passed on, he tripped quickly down toward the boarding house.

Any one who knew Miss Payson and had seen her start out would have said that she had forgotten something and had come back for it.

She passed up the steps and stopped to look into her pocketbook as if to make one more search for some article.

As she did so, her glance took in the opposite side of the street.

A rather tall man, with a slouch hat and heavy beard was leaning idly against a tree there.

Patsy could have sworn that he had been there but a few minutes.

"Now," he muttered, "we will see if Mr. Slouch Hat can't be induced to interview Miss Kitty Payson."

Apparently finding in her pocketbook, after all, what she was looking for, the supposed girl hurried down the steps again.

She had not reached the avenue, however, before she heard footsteps close behind her.

She turned as if startled.

The man who had been watching her quickly approached.

"I beg your pardon, lady," he said, humbly raising his hat, "but could you help a poor man. My wife and seven——"

"No, no," said the girl, quickly, turning away. "I have nothing."

She was not supposed to notice a cab that was approaching close to the curb.

The door appeared to have become unfastened and was flying wide open.

The man in the slouch hat had got between her and the coach.

There was not another soul in the little side street just then.

All at once, as the cab drew up beside the two, the tall man grasped the girl by the arm and hustled her toward the cab.

She struggled to get away and attempted to scream.

The man anticipated her move, however, and his grip tightened while he clasped one hand over her mouth.

In a twinkling she was hustled into the cab and the tall man sprang in after her.

As the door clicked the driver urged his horses forward at a furious pace.

As for the girl, she appeared to be in a dead faint among the cushions of the vehicle.

The man at her side was convinced that she did not know how long that journey was or to what part of the city she was being taken.

"There, my girl," he muttered, as the cab commenced to slow up at last. "I guess you'll be better off here than hobnobbing with detectives. For you know altogether too much."

The young detective maintained his immobile expression on hearing this, although the temptation to smile was strong.

When the supposed young lady came back to herself she was the occupant of a small room she had never seen before.

While neat enough, it seemed more like a prison than anything else. It was lit up with a single gas jet.

"What sort of a stunt do you call this?" cried the supposed typewriter, as soon as the door had closed on him.

As Patsy spoke he crossed the room and pulled aside the curtains that covered one of the windows.

But he could not see out.

The shutters appeared to be fastened from the outside.

"Well, I suppose it's about time I commenced to do the cry-baby act," muttered Patsy, and he at once set up an excellent imitation of a woman weeping.

"Less noise in there!" suddenly exclaimed a voice, and the door was opened.

The supposed girl stood face to face with a person of her own sex.

"Who are you and where am I?" demanded the typewriter, tearfully, coming forward and facing the woman in the middle of the chamber.

"That's none of your business," was the quick reply, and the speaker made a move toward the young detective, from which he retreated.

"But you have no right to keep me here," retorted the girl, who seemed to be plucking up her courage.

"No right, eh? I'll show you."

Patsy was seized and forced down into a chair.

The young detective's jailer was a large woman.

Her face was full and flushed, as if she had been drinking wine.

"No right, eh?" continued the woman, in a passion. "You'll be lucky if you ever see the light of day again."

Patsy could not help wondering what she meant.

"Then tell me why I'm to be kept here," pleaded the supposed girl.

"You'll know soon enough. Now if I hear you make another sound——"

And the woman gave the typewriter a look that spoke volumes.

She went out and Patsy could hear her close and lock the door behind her.

The instant she was gone the prisoner's manner changed.

He straightened up, and, tiptoeing over to the door, tried to see in which direction his jailer had gone.

"What kind of a game is this to be, I wonder?" he exclaimed, with a laugh. "I apparently know something they are afraid I shall tell the detectives. Therefore they have kidnaped me. But what can they do with me? But more important than that, who is en-

gineering the scheme? I'll wait till I find that out, and then, Mrs. Jailer, watch out for yourself!"

Some time went by before he again heard the key turn in the lock.

Patsy immediately assumed an attitude of dejection and covered his face with his hands.

The same woman again entered.

This time she held a paper in her hands.

"No crying, now," she said, angrily. "Here, read this. If you sign it, you will have your liberty at once."

The typewriter started up as if eager to see the paper.

The next moment Patsy was reading the following:

"I, Kitty Payson, do solemnly swear that I will not tell any one whom I saw outside of The Rookery on the night of Mr. Marvin's murder, and that I will not leave the city, but continue to work for him as before. I also swear that I shall tell no one of my visit to this house."

Patsy had all he could do to act his part on reading this startling news.

From the way it was worded it certainly looked as if the man she had seen was her employer himself, Henry Wilbur, the lawyer.

And yet it may have been simply a slip of the pen.

Patsy realized that he had a delicate part to play now.

"I can't take that oath," said the supposed typewriter, arising and looking into the woman's face.

"Why can't you?"

"Because——"

"Because you have already told some one that you saw Mr. Wilbur?" roared the woman.

"No, no," screamed the girl. "I swear I haven't."

"And you have told no one about the warning you received to keep quiet?"

A warning!

Revelations were coming thick and fast now.

"No," replied Patsy. "I was afraid to."

The pretty typewriter's manner convinced the old woman that she was telling the truth.

"Then why will you not sign this paper?" her jailer asked.

Patsy thought a moment.

The young detective appeared to be undecided what to do, as a young girl might naturally be.

He had discovered a link of the first importance.

Henry Wilbur had been seen outside of The Rookery the night old Marvin was killed.

Yet it was generally supposed he was out of town that night.

Patsy felt he had secured enough to work on.

So now he appeared to yield.

"God helping me, I will sign," he said, at last.

The woman looked at her prisoner as if to note her sincerity.

In another moment that white-faced girl was seated at a table with writing materials before her.

Patsy had never seen Kitty Payson's signature.

However, this was no time to hesitate.

Taking up the pen, he imitated a girl's handwriting as best he could.

His hand trembled, but this seemed natural to the woman under the circumstances.

If her employer had seen the signature he would have noticed that it looked strangely unlike Miss Payson's, and must have been written while under great mental excitement.

As Patsy blotted the ink, the woman gave a cry of exultation and eagerly caught up the paper.

Then, to Patsy's surprise, she glided swiftly to the door and passed out.

The young detective waited patiently for her return.

After a while he felt himself growing sleepy.

"I wonder if the old girl is going to flimflam me out of my liberty, now that she has my oath," he mused. "One thing is certain, I don't propose to stay in here more than another hour."

At last he heard some one approach the door again.

The woman entered, but this time she was dressed for the street.

"Well, my pretty bird," she said, "I suppose you would like to get out of the cage?"

"Yes, I would," replied the girl, anxiously. "I expect you to keep your promise."

The woman laughed harshly at this.

It was evident she did not treat promises very seriously.

"Well, come on, then, but first I think we will cover those pretty eyes of yours."

The young detective was quickly blindfolded.

Then his jailer led him out of the room and through a long, narrow hallway.

They turned and passed down two flights of stairs.

Then Patsy heard a door open, and, passing through, he felt the touch of cool night air.

He knew then he was outside the front door.

He was quickly led down the steps.

As he reached the sidewalk he gathered up his skirts.

A carriage was standing at the curb, and Patsy followed his jailer into it.

Then some one else got in behind him.

They drove away, evidently going the way the young detective had come.

Patsy timed each turn.

Finally he decided that they must be about up to Miss Payson's boarding house.

At that moment the carriage commenced to slow up.

Not a word had been spoken during the entire trip.

But now the woman said:

"Let me remove that handkerchief from your eyes, Miss Payson, and I caution you to keep your head turned away until you are out of the carriage."

The typewriter nodded in assent.

The cloth dropped from her eyes just as the carriage stopped.

"Here you are," said the woman, reaching over and opening the door, "get out now and—remember your oath."

Patsy stepped out of the carriage.

As he did so, he came face to face with a figure dressed exactly like himself.

The real Miss Payson, for she it was, started back with a cry of fright.

The inmates of the carriage were staring at the two figures in the utmost wonder.

For an instant no one spoke.

The first to move was Patsy.

Turning toward the carriage, he said, in his natural voice:

"My friends, take your pick!"

"Curses and furies!" shouted a man's voice within the carriage, tugging vigorously at the signal cord that connected with the driver's seat. "We are betrayed!"

The horses sprang forward at the lash of the driver's whip.

Just as they started an electric light shone full in the face of the man within.

The young detective, in that brief instant, could see that he was wearing a slouch hat and had a full beard!

CHAPTER V.

THE DEPOSIT CHECK.

Meanwhile Nick Carter and his assistant, Chick, were having their hands full, also.

While Chick hovered around the scene of the murder, Nick, early in the evening, made his way toward Little Italy.

The excitement caused by the appearance of the supposed thief had not lasted long.

A policeman had made a careful search of the premises, but had not discovered that anything was missing.

He considered that he had been summoned on "a fool's errand," and told the tenants as much.

After the old Italian woman's visitor had gone, she proceeded to the little door in the wall which Nick had seen her unlock.

From an inner recess she drew a leather pocketbook of healthy dimensions, and took from it some papers which she looked at some time with a smile on her face.

Taking some of the papers from the wallet for good, she separated them into two bundles.

Then she wrapped each carefully with a string and placed them in two envelopes.

This done, she hid the envelopes in her bosom.

"I will make these safe," she said, craftily. "They won't be here when he comes."

A few hours later she went up the stone steps and threaded the streets for some time.

All at once she turned up a narrow court.

Some distance along she dodged into a rough-looking building, where she met a boy who greeted her with a smile, as if she had been there before.

"Is Solano here?" asked the woman.

"No. But he will be soon," was the reply.

"No matter," said the woman. "I want him to keep these for me," and the envelopes with their precious contents passed out of her hands.

She saw them buried in a steel safe where they would be secure.

"There, I have fixed things at last," she smiled, as she went back. "Now you may come whenever you like."

It was at about this time that Nick Carter was starting out for Little Italy.

The hour was about nine.

When he reached the vicinity of Valencia's rooms he became more cautious, and looked about him for any of those he had seen in the morning.

There was not a soul there he had seen before.

This was not to be wondered at.

The crowds that make up New York's teeming population in the daytime are seldom seen in the same places at night.

Besides, Nick had altered his disguise somewhat, so that he was now a fairly well-to-do Italian merchant.

He hung about the stone steps some time before he saw an opportunity to slip down them.

At last, however, he reached the foot of the stairs unnoticed and cautiously entered the building.

He found he could reach the room he was seeking by the hallway instead of by passing through the rooms.

He was glad of this, for it lessened the chances of discovery.

A turn in the hall brought him to the room he wanted.

He looked about to see if there were any place to hide, in case some one came through the hall.

He found a stairway leading to the floor above, behind which he could easily dodge.

The next moment Nick had drawn himself up as before, and was straining his eyes to look down into the room on the other side.

For a little while he saw nothing on account of the semi-darkness.

But by degrees he took in the room and its contents.

He saw a woman leaning back in a chair, her arm hanging along its sides, and her eyes staring strangely at the ceiling overhead.

That was enough for Nick Carter.

The next instant he had dropped to the floor and was trying key after key in the stubborn lock.

The last one pushed back the bolt, and the detective opened the door.

He entered the room and stopped in front of the woman in the chair.

She still sat there with that strange stare in her eyes.

Her face had the dark appearance of one who has been strangled.

"I don't like this," muttered Nick, feeling of the woman's wrist. He could see it was the woman who had called herself old Marvin's widow.

There was no pulse.

He placed his hand over her heart, but felt no movement.

Valencia was dead.

Nick stepped back and threw a hasty glance around the room.

He saw that things were disarranged, as if some one had been searching every corner.

Nick Carter could guess what the murderer had been searching for.

The detective turned to the woman once more.

There had been no particular struggle, as far as he could see.

Just then his eyes happened to glance toward the dead woman's feet.

Something until then unseen had caught his eye.

He picked up a little metal disk with some letters and figures on it.

He leaned toward the dim light with it in his hand. The characters were in stencil and read:

"Solano's, 11037."

"Solano's, eh?" muttered Nick. "So Valencia has been to Solano's. She left something in the old man's keeping, for here is the deposit check."

Slipping the check in his pocket, Nick went out and locked the door as he had found it.

"I need not be the first person to give the alarm," he said, as he passed along the hallway. "Some one will discover her soon enough."

Halfway across the city and down into the little court Nick went, to turn up in the shop where Solano took things for safe-keeping, and charged exorbitant prices for his trouble.

"Gootta morn, signor," exclaimed the little old fellow, on catching sight of the detective.

"Hello, there, Solano," cried Nick, grasping the Italian's extended hand. "You've got something here I want to see. Just give me the package this calls for, that's a good fellow."

And Nick handed him the deposit check.

The old man took it wonderingly and bent down before his safe.

At last he produced a large leather envelope.

"Dis belong to Valencia," he said, in surprise. "Dis yours no."

"That's all right. Valencia won't mind my looking at it. Do you suppose she would have given me the check otherwise?"

This seemed plausible to the old man, and he slowly handed Nick the envelope.

The ferret carefully broke the seal and drew forth the contents of the package.

There were a number of old papers referring to the sailing of ships from several Southern ports.

The dates on the papers were all twenty years before or more.

If Nick had hoped to discover the confession the old woman had spoken of, he was doomed to disappointment.

Looking in the envelope again, he saw a small slip of paper caught in the bottom of it.

It was dated that very day.

Nick opened his eyes with surprise as he glanced at it.

It read as follows:

"I am to be visited by Henry Wilbur to-night, and I want these papers to be out of his way when he comes. VALENCIA."

Nick's and Patsy's trails seemed to be running in the same groove.

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE PIER.

Nick Carter, as has been seen, had sent his assistant, Chick, to watch at the scene of the crime.

No one would have suspected that a murder had been committed there only the night before.

An officer in plain clothes was quietly looking over the old man's effects. The room where he boarded had already been searched.

So far the police had been utterly baffled in their hunt for the murderer.

There was not a shred of evidence to show who had done the deed.

Several interesting points in the dead man's career had been learned, however.

It seemed that Marvin was not his real name, for several old envelopes were found in his safe addressed to "Frederick M. Craft" and "F. Marvin Craft."

Other papers showed he had formerly lived in the South, where he had owned several vessels that sailed between New Orleans and Cuba.

Then there were some letters regarding insurance which seemed to indicate some of the vessels had been lost.

In fact, it looked as if his Cuban trade had been a failing venture.

At any rate, he seemed to be poor enough at the time of his death.

As for the "Wicks' estate," that seemed to be a fiction.

When Chick arrived, the officer was in the midst of these documents.

His name was Frank Bradley, and, as he knew Chick personally, he readily admitted the detective.

They went through the remaining letters together.

Most of them were from distant points.

At last Chick came to one postmarked New York City.

It was merely a scrawl and read:

"Yurs rec'd. Yes, he is in this city. Look out fur trubble. Yurs trooly, DUFFY."

There was no postmark on the envelope or date within, but the ink was not many months old, despite the fact that the letter had been found among some of the very oldest.

Chick passed it on to the officer, who read it with interest.

"Duffy. Who's Duffy, I wonder? This don't tell us much, does it, Chick?"

"Not a great deal," replied Chick, quietly. "Well, if that's all there is," he continued, "I guess I might as well get busy where there is more doing."

And, bidding the officer a cheery good-day, he started down the stairs.

When he reached the street he walked slowly along for some distance, gradually quickening his pace.

Presently he turned down toward the North River.

Chick knew the piers of New York like a book.

Many a time he had shadowed his man among the motley people who live so near the surface of the water.

Ten minutes later he was looking into the bleared face of a 'longshoreman, who was standing near one of the piers close to the Battery.

"Is Duffy anywhere about?" asked Chick, crisply.

"You will find him in the palace, if you know where that is," said the 'longshoreman. "But yonder, sir. Is that man waiting for you?"

Chick turned in time to catch a glimpse of a figure before it dodged out of sight.

"Why, I told Charley to wait for me," said Chick, quickly. "Yes, he's my friend, I think. How was he dressed?"

The man could not describe the one he had noticed beyond saying that he was a young chap whose clothes seemed much the worse for wear.

"Yes, that's the chap," said Chick, glibly. "Just keep your eye on him, will you, if he shows up again, and tell him not to follow me, but to wait till I come back!"

"Yes, sir, I'll do that," said the man, and his fingers closed over a coin which Chick slipped into his hand.

As Chick started forward, however, he muttered: "So I'm watched, am I?"

Chick looked back again, but there was no sign of the shadow to be seen.

He quickly reached the pier, and, passing around a pile of refuse, came to a narrow opening.

A sort of ladder led down through this opening.

Descending by means of it, Chick came upon a small figure in the dim light whom he instantly recognized.

It was Duffy.

This strange character had figured prominently in one of Chick's previous cases.

Although not a criminal himself, it was shown that he had a way of giving warnings to people who had detectives on their track.

Chick had won his everlasting gratitude by saving his life once when a certain criminal suspected the dwarf of treachery. In that way he had learned of the river rat's strange home under the pier.

"Well, Duffy," he said, "I see you've been poking your nose into the Marvin murder."

"Not I," replied the dwarf, quickly. "I didn't even know he was dead."

"Come now," said Chick, "we have a note you wrote him telling him to look out for trouble."

"Well, what has that got to do with his murder?"

"Because trouble and murder mean the same thing in this instance," retorted Chick, sharply.

Duffy saw there was to be no trifling.

"What do you want to know?" he asked, sinking to a box and clasping his knees.

"First," said Chick, resting against the ladder, "whom did you mean when you said he was in the city."

Duffy was tempted at first to "string" the detective.

He thought better of it, however, when he caught the determined glitter of Chick's eyes.

"Well, if you must know, it was Wilbur," said the dwarf, shortly.

"Wilbur? Wilbur who?"

"No, not Wilbur who. Henry Wilbur."

Chick started.

"Not the lawyer?"

"That's the chap."

"Why, he has an office directly opposite old Marvin's?"

"Funny, ain't it?" asked the dwarf, showing his yellow teeth as he laughed.

Chick did not laugh. He was thinking deeply.

"Henry Wilbur," he muttered, half aloud, "the pretty typewriter's employer."

"Duffy!" cried Chick, suddenly, fixing a penetrating look on the dwarf's face. "Are you telling me the truth?"

"I hope to die," he exclaimed, earnestly, "if I'm not."

"But why did old Marvin care whether he were in the city or not?"

"Well, he just did, that's all."

"Were they enemies?"

"I guesses they wuzn't lovin' friends."

"How did you come to know about it?"

"Old Marvin sent fer me."

"Well?"

"This was before Mr. Wilbur came to The Rookery. You know he has only been there six months or so. Old Marvin discovered he wuz in another part of the city and he most threw a fit.

"Then the lawyer chap disappeared and old Marvin set me to watch fer him to come back. He suddenly turns up about six months ago, and what does he do but move down to The Rookery and take the office directly opposite old man Marvin's."

"And is that why you warned Marvin to look out for trouble."

"No. I wrote that letter before I knew where he was going. I——"

A sudden darkening of the opening above caused him to stop and look up.

Before either he or the detective could move a heavy object came crashing down upon Chick and stretched him out on the floor of the retreat.

The object just grazed Duffy.

It was a bag of mortar that had been lying on the pier.

The dwarf was up the stairs in a twinkling.

As he turned toward the street he came face to face with a figure who pounced upon him.

The dwarf was small but wiry.

He grappled with his assailant, and a furious struggle followed.

Back and forth they swayed on the edge of the opening.

For a time it looked as if the dwarf would overcome his antagonist, but at last the other's superior strength began to tell.

Just then the dwarf made a movement his opponent was not looking for.

He suddenly broke away, and, stooping down, grasped the fellow's legs with the intention of tripping him.

The stranger turned and stepped quickly to one side.

As he did so his left fist caught the dwarf directly under the chin and sent him reeling backward.

The opening was directly in his way.

Before he could recover his balance his left foot shot through the hole and he whirled downward.

He struck the floor with a terrific thud, close to the spot where Chick lay.

The detective had only been stunned, and the noise caused by the dwarf's fall seemed to bring him back to his senses.

Duffy had been knocked unconscious.

As Chick struggled to his feet he saw his assailant come swiftly down through the opening.

The detective's head still reeled from the blow he had received.

He knew he could be easily overcome in a hand-to-hand struggle.

Reaching to his pocket, he pulled out his revolver.

His assailant saw his movement and sprang toward him.

Chick fired.

There is not a detective in the metropolis whose aim is surer than his.

Yet this time he missed his man.

Before he could fire again, he found the revolver knocked out of his hands.

His assailant sprang behind him and pinned his arms to his side.

He had a rope with him and with this he quickly bound the detective.

He didn't look to see if Chick had another revolver.

Whether he had or not did not seem just then of the slightest importance.

After securing the detective, he bent over the dwarf and bound him likewise.

Then he mounted the ladder and disappeared.

CHAPTER VII.

A BREAK FOR FREEDOM.

The 'longshoreman waited some time for Chick's "friend" to make his appearance.

At last he decided he was not coming, so the 'longshoreman left to join some friends in a nearby saloon.

When he was out of sight a figure emerged from a pile of freight directly behind the point where he had been standing.

Thus it was that he made his way onto the pier unseen.

After leaving his prisoners bound in Duffy's retreat he stole cautiously to the nearest telegraph office.

There he asked for a messenger boy.

Two or three sprang up at the clerk's summons.

The stranger hastily scribbled a note, and inclosed it in an envelope, which he sealed.

Giving it to the messenger, he told him to deliver it and bring back a reply to the office.

He would call for it two hours later.

If he didn't call by that time, the messenger was to go down to Pier No. —— and wait there for him.

The messenger set off at once.

Glancing at the address, he noticed that it was on the upper East Side, a good hour and a half's journey there and back.

Strange to say, the address tallied exactly with the house where Patsy was at that moment a prisoner.

As for the sender of the message, he started back toward the pier, using more caution than ever that he was not seen.

Peering down into the retreat, he saw the detective and Duffy lying exactly where he had left them.

However, he proposed to take no chances, so he drew his revolver, and held it in readiness in case either of his prisoners should spring a surprise on him.

He had been watching some minutes when he saw Duffy stir uneasily.

The dwarf was coming to.

The man above did not, however, see Chick give the dwarf a gentle kick with his foot to call his attention.

The dwarf looked wonderingly at the detective, but Chick's warning glance cautioned him not to speak.

Chick himself was keeping his mind busy planning a course of action.

His captor, he felt confident, was undoubtedly in league with the murderer of old Marvin.

How much of his conversation with the dwarf the stranger had overheard, Chick did not know.

But there was no doubt that his attack had been made as a result of what he had overheard.

Chick now attempted to move his arms.

He used the utmost caution, for the slightest sound would be fatal to his plans.

The cords were fastened tightly around him.

The man who had bound him knew his business.

But Chick had escaped from a tighter hole than this, and he had by no means reached the giving up point.

His next movement was to set his muscles and

gradually strain at his bonds until his whole strength was set to burst them apart.

He held his breath while he did this, and his veins stood out on his forehead.

But when he relaxed, the strain of the cords was ever so slightly reduced.

Chick noted this with a feeling of satisfaction.

He was in a position where he could see his captor out of the corner of his eye.

He saw the man held a revolver in his hand, so that the first suspicious movement that was seen would be disastrous to him.

Once more Chick set his muscles and once more he felt the rope stretch a trifle.

He was so lying that his left hand was hidden by his body and was yet not on the floor.

He rested a moment now and glanced upward again.

He could hear the swish of the restless water close to him, and his eyes, now accustomed to the semi-darkness, took in the strange surroundings of the abode of the river rat.

Chick now attempted again to move his left arm.

The cords had become sufficiently slackened to allow him a leeway of two or three inches.

When he realized this a glitter came into his eyes.

Now there would soon be something doing, if all went well.

The hip pocket of his trousers contained a revolver.

He always carried two with him, but, as has been seen, his captor had secured one of them.

His hand now sought to push up his coat so as to expose his weapon.

It was tedious work, and his fingers soon became cramped.

But he worked on silently, while his coat went higher and higher by fractions of inches.

Every little while his captor got up to take a look toward the street.

While his attention was thus turned Chick worked furiously to get his hand free, at the same time cautioning the dwarf to lie absolutely still.

But it was no use. The cords held true, and the best Chick could do was to move his hand a trifle more freely.

At last, however, his fingers touched the cold metal of his revolver, and he began to work it slowly out of his pocket.

Finally it was ready to fall out.

This was a ticklish moment for the detective, for, if he should fail to grasp it as it fell, all his work would go for naught.

Just then the weapon slipped out.

Chick's fingers strained harder than ever, but it was his thumb that stuck into the trigger guard and held the revolver balanced in midair.

To get it into his fingers after that was an easy matter.

But now came the most dangerous thing of all to do.

He must get it in such a position that he could aim it directly at the stranger above.

At first he thought of moving his body about so that, by raising his knee, he could sight the weapon at the man above.

But he quickly decided this would not do.

If the man should suspect something was wrong the detective would never have time to get the drop on him before he discovered what his prisoner was up to.

No, he must aim the weapon where it was!

Chick had often achieved the most marvelous results by aiming a rifle by means of a mirror.

That, however, was simplicity itself, compared to the feat he was now to attempt.

First he calculated the distance above him.

Then he determined the angle between that point and his captor.

After that it was necessary to guess the distance from the perpendicular to the point where the man was sitting.

Chick made all these observations with the utmost care.

His eye, trained to the calculation of the smallest distances, enabled him to fix finally upon the direction his revolver would have to be aimed.

He did not want to kill his man, for, being in ignorance of Nick's and Patsy's latest discoveries, he

felt that he had found what might be the only link between old Mr. Marvin and the murderer.

Chick worked his revolver slowly over the side of his leg and under the end of his coat until just the tip end of the barrel protruded.

He had managed everything successfully up to this point, when his captor made a movement toward the opening.

Chick instantly drew back his weapon.

His captor seeing his prisoners lying just as he had left them, turned toward the street once more.

The pier was deserted, save for some men working at the river end of it.

Few, if any of them, knew of the dwarf's underground retreat.

The sound of Chick's shot some time before was drowned by the noise caused by their movements.

As he sat down again Chick's captor looked anxiously at a battered old silver watch he carried.

The two hours were nearly up.

Bang!

The man fairly bounded from his seat.

His revolver dropped from his grasp.

With an expression of agony on his features, he clapped his left hand to his right arm.

Chick's bullet had struck the target.

The man realized instantly what had happened.

He staggered over to where his revolver lay and attempted to pick it up with his left hand.

As he bent over, however, the pier swam before him.

Suddenly it seemed to rise up and strike his forehead.

He felt himself falling, and, after that, all was darkness.

Chick could not see the man now, but he heard him fall.

"Quick, Duffy!" he cried. "Roll toward me!"

As he spoke he rolled his own body toward the dwarf.

As they bumped into each other Chick cried:

"Get your teeth at work on this knot, and I will do the same on yours."

The knots were not tied tightly, although they would never have pulled out.

Chick was the first to master the cords that held the dwarf, and a moment later he, too, was free.

There were several bruises on the detective's body where he had struck the floor when knocked down, but these were all forgotten now.

With revolver in hand he ascended the ladder prepared for surprises.

His late captor was shaking his head and rolling his eyes, showing he was only half conscious.

The first thing to do was to disarm him, and Chick lost no time in doing this.

By this time the dwarf was by his side, and together they examined the wound.

"I aimed better than I expected," observed Chick. "His wound is not serious."

"Hully gee! But say, that wuz a peachy shot!" commented the dwarf, warmly.

After hastily binding up the fellow's wound, Chick searched him.

There was nothing unusual found in his pocket, so slipping a pair of handcuffs on him, Chick left Duffy on guard, while he went for an officer to take charge of him.

On the edge of the pier Chick met a messenger boy.

"Say, mister," said the youngster, "do you know this feller?" and he held up a letter.

It was addressed to "R. N. S."

"R. N. S.?" repeated Chick, glancing at the envelope, "how should I know what that means?"

"Because the feller it's fer told me to wait fer him on this pier."

Chick had started on, but he stopped short on hearing this.

"He did, eh? Let me see it again!"

The messenger handed it to him.

"Oh, I see," said Chick, with a laugh. "This is for Ralph Nolan, Superintendent."

"Yes, sir. I guess that's it," said the boy.

"Well, I'll give it to Nolan. What's the charge?"

The boy told him, and Chick quickly paid it.

He watched the messenger till he was across the street, then he quickly tore open the envelope.

This is what he read:

"You did right. Hold them there till I come. Can't go down now, but will arrive before midnight.

"H. W."

Chick decided not to call an officer for the present.

Instead, he sent a note to Nick Carter's office.

It was destined, however, to lie unopened many hours.

CHAPTER VIII.

A RACE FOR LIFE.

Half an hour before Chick sent his note Nick Carter was sitting in his office.

Although disappointed in not finding the Italian woman's confession, which she had claimed was made in her presence by old Mr. Marvin himself, the famous detective knew that he had a find of the utmost importance.

The old woman was dead, and she had said that Henry Wilbur was to visit her that very night.

The next thing was to find out the whereabouts of the lawyer.

Nothing had come from Chick or Patsy as yet.

A little later the detective, looking not at all like himself, might have been seen in a part of the city he had not visited for some time.

He had learned Henry Wilbur's house address through the city directory.

It was on the West Side, in the section known as Greenwich, near Eighth Street.

He stood watching for a time a house which stood back of the sidewalk and in the shadow of several trees which almost touched the bricks with their spreading branches.

After waiting a few minutes he ran up the steps and pressed the bell.

When a servant opened the door he asked:

"Is Mr. Wilbur in?"

"No, sir. He is out of town."

"When is he expected back?"

"I do not know, sir."

Nick thanked her, and the door closed.

Ten minutes afterward he again descended the steps.

This time he did not ring the bell.

Instead he pulled out a few keys, which he tried rapidly in the lock.

The third one fitted, and, opening the door, he entered noiselessly.

He did not stop long in the hall, but went up the flight of steps in front of him.

From the appearance of the interior, Nick saw it was a boarding house.

The cards of the different guests were pinned to their doors.

Nick passed boldly along until he came to a card bearing the name of "Henry Wilbur, Lawyer."

Then one of the boarders came down the stairs from above.

Without hesitation Nick started up the next flight and passed him.

He no doubt took the detective for one of the boarders.

As soon as the man had gone out the front door, however, Nick turned back.

Taking a skeleton key from his pocket, he opened the lawyer's door and walked into a room whose window looked down upon the street.

Nick Carter looked over the place with great caution.

The light from the street lit it up fairly well.

He moved about on tiptoe and with the noiseless motion of a cat.

When he touched anything or lifted it up he put it back just as he had found it.

There was absolutely nothing to indicate that the lawyer was anything else than the person of eminent respectability he passed for among all who knew him.

The appearance of the rooms, however, convinced Nick that Henry Wilbur had no intention of leaving the house for good when he last passed out of it.

His clothes were carefully arranged, and the contents of the bureau were not disturbed as they would be if he had contemplated sudden flight.

"Better than I thought," muttered Nick Carter, with a nod of satisfaction. "Now to spread a net for the worthy lawyer."

Leaving the room, he walked down the stairs and out of the house without encountering any one.

Selecting a secluded point opposite the house, he took up his vigil for the man he was seeking.

He knew he had no direct evidence against the lawyer, although the circumstances of the case pointed so clearly toward him.

He had got a fairly good description of him from the corner druggist as he came along.

The druggist spoke of Mr. Wilbur as a rather tall man, with a blond mustache.

He had no beard or side whiskers.

The man Nick had seen talking with the Italian woman was tall, but there the similarity ended.

He had a dark beard, and no mustache.

The big clock in Jefferson Market struck the hour of ten, but no figure corresponding to the druggist's description or to that of the man he had seen, entered the boarding house.

Eleven o'clock struck, and Nick Carter still waited.

Then came twelve o'clock, but there was no sign of the lawyer.

The great clock had just struck one, and the street had long been absolutely deserted when footsteps were heard.

Nick peered out and saw two figures approaching with rapid footsteps.

They were a man and a woman.

At the same moment the sound of a fire bell and the rumbling of an engine, drawn by galloping horses, came to his ears.

The engine turned the corner of the street Nick was in and came dashing down it.

Nick glanced around to see if the fire was near by, but there was no sign of it as far as his eye could see.

The two persons who were approaching were about to cross the street when the fire engine hove in sight.

They hesitated an instant.

Then the man, seeing he had plenty of time, started across.

The woman came after him, then turned back, then started forward again.

Nick saw her hesitate.

Realizing her danger, he sprang from his hiding place, shouting:

"Look out, there!"

The frightened girl turned, then stopped as if paralyzed, in the middle of the street.

By this time the horses and engine were rushing down upon her.

The driver yelled frantically to the girl to get out of the way.

The man with her also called out:

"Run, Clara, run!"

But it was too late.

In a flash the plunging horses were upon her.

She threw up her hands in terror and fell directly in front of the plunging animals.

It was a moment of horror.

The girl was knocked to one side, and fell quivering on the side of the asphalt street, while Nick Carter ran to her side.

The horses had passed on.

When the detective lifted the form of the girl he saw a shudder pass over her white face.

"My God! Is she dead?" asked a voice.

Even in that exciting moment Nick Carter could scarcely suppress a start of surprise.

He had heard that voice before.

Turning quickly, he looked into the face of a man.

He tallied in every particular with the description the druggist had given of Henry Wilbur.

"Who is she?" asked half a dozen men who had reached the spot.

No one answered.

Nick had relinquished his hold on the girl, and she was being supported by her companion.

"Call an ambulance," said some one.

"You shall not," spoke up the man, quickly. "This girl is my niece, and, as she is not badly hurt, I will take care of her."

It was the lawyer who spoke.

Carrying the girl to the sidewalk, she managed to get on her feet, though nearly fainting from the fearful shock.

Supporting her with his arm, the lawyer nearly carried her to the boarding house and up the steps.

All this did not seem to have occupied more than three minutes.

The couple were watched by the crowd, little thinking of the terrible suspicion that was at that moment hanging over the man.

Nick Carter slipped away unseen, and once more took up his position opposite the lawyer's house.

True to his expectations, it was not many minutes before the door opened and the lawyer fairly ran down the steps.

He cut across the street to save time, muttering:

"Quarter past one, and I said I should be there at midnight. Curses on the way things are going tonight."

Nick saw him run up the elevated stairs at the corner, and he looked to see if there was a train in sight.

One was just leaving the next station.

Waiting until it was almost in, Nick walked up the stairs and carelessly bought a ticket.

He was not noticed as he stepped aboard

As for the lawyer, Nick had spotted him as he entered the car behind.

The train sped rapidly downtown.

Park Place was reached and passed, but the lawyer made no move to get off.

Finally the train came to Battery Place, next to the last stop before South Ferry is reached.

Nick walked out directly behind a portly woman carrying a great basket.

In this way he escaped being seen by the lawyer.

Nick followed his man down to West Street and then up along the piers of the river.

The detective wore a puzzled look on his face as he tried to imagine where the man could be going.

Suddenly the lawyer darted across the street toward one of the piers.

As he reached the edge of it, Nick was surprised to hear a long, low whistle.

It seemed to be broken off suddenly.

The detective knew then something was up on the pier, so he made for it on the run.

It was dark as pitch where he had last seen the lawyer.

He pressed stealthily forward, going by several boxes of freight and other matter.

As he paused he heard the sound of rapid footsteps on the other side of the freight.

He drew back among the boxes.

Then a revolver shot rang out.

What could it mean?

Nick ran back toward the street, intending to go around to the other side of the freight.

A flying figure, running up West Street, caught his eye.

At the same instant some one collided violently with him.

It was Chick.

Both were stunned for an instant.

"Nick Carter!" gasped Chick. "Quick! There goes our man!"

There was no time for explanations.

Both detectives bounded forward at full speed.

But the man they were pursuing had a handsome lead.

There was not a policeman in sight.

Up West Street dashed the three figures.

Both of the detectives were splendid athletes, and, if they could keep their man in sight, there was no doubt how the race would come out.

In fact, already they were commencing to close in on the fugitive.

For several blocks the race kept on.

Then the fugitive veered toward the street.

"The ferry!" panted Chick, redoubling his efforts.

The man dashed into the ferryhouse of the Jersey Central Railroad at the foot of Liberty Street.

A boat was about to leave.

The gates for carriages had already been closed.

Throwing his money down at the ticket office, he grasped a ticket and flung it into the ticket box.

Dong! Dong!

"All aboard!" shouted the gateman, starting to roll the great gate into place.

"Hi, there! Wait a minute," shouted the man, frantically.

He dashed forward in time to catch the gateman's eye.

This official held the gate a second while he squeezed through.

Then it clanked to, and the bolt shot into place.

The man kept on running until he was safe on board the boat.

He dropped down on one of the seats and fairly gasped for breath.

But his eyes were glued to the gate he had just passed through.

Were his pursuers in time?

The big ferryboat had already begun to move.

Just as it reached the end of the slip he heard shouts in the ferryhouse, followed by the sounds of a commotion.

Then all was still save for the churning of the water by the big screw, and the sound of the engines.

When the boat reached her slip in Jersey City the man who had run so hard to catch it did not seem to be in a hurry at all about going on shore.

Instead, while all were at the forward end of the boat, he quietly climbed over the side, and, grasping the top of the slip, pulled himself upon it.

Then he disappeared on the other side.

Thus it was that half a dozen of the ferry officials watched in vain for a certain person to come off the boat.

And thus it was that the most rigid search of the boat also failed to disclose the man they were after.

CHAPTER IX.

PICKING UP THE TRAIL.

Nick Carter and his assistant were about ten seconds too late to catch the boat.

Chick could not restrain an exclamation of rage and disappointment as he saw the boat pull out.

"Great heavens! The fellow's luck is as good as a license to steal," he gasped, between breaths.

Nick was also panting heavily, but said nothing.

After a minute he turned and walked toward the ferrymaster.

Introducing himself, he told of the man who had just escaped him and asked the ferrymaster if he could not be headed off from the other side.

The ferrymaster opened his eyes when he realized Nick Carter was standing before him.

Orders were quickly transmitted.

A telephone connected the two sides of the river.

The Jersey City officials were given a full description of the man, but, as has been seen, they failed to locate him.

In the meantime Nick decided to take the next boat across.

"Now, Chick," he said, leading the way to a seat at one corner of the waiting-room, "tell me how it all happened."

"Didn't you get my message?" asked Chick, in surprise.

"I got no message from you," said Nick.

"Then it's lying in the office."

Chick then told his chief of the startling events of the afternoon, how he had been made a prisoner, and in turn, had made his captor a prisoner.

He also told how he intercepted the message which told him his prisoner's accomplice would arrive around midnight.

"I waited till long after midnight," continued Chick, "and had about decided he was not coming when I heard footsteps on the pier. My prisoner was weak from his wound, and had fallen asleep, apparently. I did not lock him up for fear some one would see me going through the streets with him and give the other fellow warning."

"That was perfectly right," said Nick. "Go on."

"As soon as we heard the footsteps my prisoner let out a peculiar whistle."

"I heard it," muttered Nick.

"At that instant," went on Chick, "the footsteps stopped. I knew the fellow's whistle had been one of warning. So I left Duffy guarding him and sprang toward the street. I could hear some one retreating rapidly, and, as I came into the light, I saw him flying up the street. At the same instant I bumped into you."

"Hard luck all around," exclaimed Nick. "However, we may not have lost him yet. I shall go over on the next boat and see what luck they've had."

"Shall I go with you?" asked Nick.

"No, you'd better take care of your prisoner. Lock him up simply on the charge of assault. Then make tracks for the office, and see what Patsy has learned. I shall call you up on the telephone some time between now and to-morrow noon."

"This noon, you mean, don't you?" laughed Chick, looking up at the clock.

"Right you are, Chick. Well, there's my boat, so here goes."

And the two detectives parted.

On arriving at the office, after locking up his prisoner, Chick found Patsy asleep.

The young detective sprang to his feet as Chick entered.

Both were surprised to learn of the other's adventures.

"By gracious, Chick, all three of us struck the right trail at the first crack out of the box."

"You're right, Patsy. And it's going to be the sensation of the day when Henry Wilbur is nailed for the Marvin murder."

"Then you don't think Nick has got him?"

"He may have him, but, if so, it will surprise me. The fellow must have known we would try to head him off, and if he had any sense, he dropped overboard long before the boat reached Jersey City."

Chick's judgment seemed to be justified by the event, for, while he dozed with one ear open for the ring of the telephone, no sound was heard during the remainder of the night.

It was nearly ten o'clock the next morning when Nick Carter called up Chick to tell him the lawyer had disappeared, but that he had struck what he thought was his trail.

Chick then told of Patsy's discoveries.

Nick Carter's eyes glistened as he heard of his young aide's plucky adventure.

He had Patsy come to the 'phone.

Whatever it was Nick said, Patsy's face flushed with pleasure.

Chick took it all in, and when Patsy hung up the receiver, he clapped the young detective on the back, and, laughingly, cried out:

"Which would you rather be, Patsy, Rockefeller or Nick Carter's aide?"

Patsy took Chick's bantering good-naturedly and then told him of the orders Nick had added to his warm words of commendation.

He was to keep his eyes on Miss Payson's house, while Chick quietly took possession of Henry Wilbur's office.

The morning papers had been lying in the entry since an early hour.

Both detectives were now wide-awake.

Glancing quickly through one of the papers, Chick suddenly exclaimed:

"Here it is, Patsy. They found that murdered Italian woman!"

"The one Nick discovered?"

"That's the one, Risben," and Chick read the account of it.

It was just a paragraph, as follows:

"FOUND DEAD.

"A woman known as Valencia, who lived at —— Mulberry Street, was found dead in her room at an early hour this morning. The body was seated in an arm-chair when discovered, and it is supposed she died from strangulation. The police are investigating the case, which they claim, looks strongly like murder."

"Well, I should say it did," commented Patsy. "Great head on the part of the police."

Nick Carter also saw the item in the paper he was reading.

When he had arrived in Jersey City, and had made it certain his man had not gone through the ferry-house, he at once asked to go out on the slip where the previous boat had come in.

As a rule, each side of the ferryslips backs up against the sides of the next slip.

There is usually enough space between them to admit of the passage of a man.

The space is also partially filled with ballast, so that a person could easily drop over the top of the slip without injury and conceal himself there.

Nick started out on the left-hand side first.

He made as thorough a search as he could in the dark, but there was nothing to indicate a man had recently been there.

Then he took the other side.

Careful as the fugitive had been, he had scraped off a little of the grease with which the boards are smeared to permit the boats to slide along as they warp into place.

Nick's keen eye detected this as he peered over the top of the beams.

There were also finger marks along the edge.

Nick moved more cautiously now.

He poked into every recess where a man could possibly hide, but discovered nothing further.

Satisfied that the lawyer had escaped in that way, Nick thanked the officials and passed out of the station to the street.

There was every chance that the man had dropped onto the ferryboat in the next slip and had gone back to New York.

He would never dare to pass out of the station at Jersey City, for the officials were still watching like cats at every exit.

However, Nick took the precaution to post several officers outside to keep watch.

Some of them had been in the vicinity for several hours, but none had seen a man such as the detective described.

Nick then took the next boat back to New York.

True to his judgment, although the ferry officials had not seen the man Nick had tried so hard to capture, they had seen a fellow in a slouch hat and black beard, who seemed in a hurry to get out of the ferry-house.

By this time it was so late Nick realized it would be best to wait till morning.

He knew the lawyer would be afraid to go to his office or to his boarding house for fear of capture.

Indeed, Henry Wilbur at that moment considered himself the most relentlessly hunted man in the metropolis.

If he had known that Nick had recrossed the river after finding he had disappeared in Jersey City, and was again hot on his trail, it is doubtful if the man would have known which way to turn.

As it was, he disappeared in a boarding house near the river front just as Nick Carter walked into one of the downtown hotels not a block away and asked for the room he always kept reserved there.

CHAPTER X.

NICK MAKES A DATE.

When Henry Wilbur awoke from a troubled sleep late the next morning, the sun was streaming into the room.

He had not undressed, but had thrown himself down upon the bed without even removing his coat.

However, he did take the trouble to tear off his false beard and throw his slouch hat on a chair.

His first act on arising was to send out the maid for a messenger.

When he came he sent him to a certain address on the East Side, and told him to ask the woman who opened the door to come at once to —— Washington Street.

This was the number of the boarding house he was in.

He awaited her arrival impatiently.

"Curse the luck," he suddenly muttered, rising from his chair and pacing the floor. "Whichever way I turn those hounds are on my track. Why did Gordon lead me into that trap on the pier?"

His eyes flashed, as he stopped suddenly.

"Could that have been some of the detective's work?" he asked himself. "No, I cannot believe it. The note had my private mark on it. No," he repeated, "something must have slipped up with him."

"There's no use," he added, with a snarl, "it's the detective's life or mine now."

He was in the midst of his bitter reflections when he heard the doorbell ring.

He ran quickly down the stairs and opened the door himself.

The woman he was expecting stood outside.

"Ha, you've come, have you?" said the lawyer, in a tone far from amiable. "Not a word," he added, as the woman started to speak. "Follow me."

He led the way up to his room, and, after the woman had entered, he closed the door and locked it.

"Sit down, Nina," he said, shortly.

The woman took one of the chairs and raised her veil.

If Patsy had seen her he would have recognized her instantly.

She was the jailer of the supposed Kitty Payson.

"Something's gone wrong with you, Wilbur," she exclaimed, noting the hunted look on the lawyer's face.

"Everything has gone wrong, Nina," he burst out, bitterly. "Gordon slipped up completely, and, instead of having his men, they probably had him."

"And you?"

"I came as near running my head into a noose as I ever care to. The result is the detectives have spotted me and are now so close on my track that I don't dare walk up this street."

And he told her of his narrow escape on the ferry-boat.

"Now, Nina, listen to me," he continued. "The detectives on my track are Nick Carter and his men. I'm not afraid of his assistants, but this cursed Nick Carter makes just one too many. I tell you that so long as he lives I am in deadly danger."

"That is true," said the cool woman.

Henry Wilbur said nothing for a moment.

He seemed to be studying the face before him.

There was a strange resemblance between the two that one would not notice at first glance.

As a matter of fact, they were brother and sister.

"Therefore," said the man, slowly, and he spoke between closed teeth, "Nick Carter must die to-day."

The woman started slightly, but she did not flinch.

Twenty minutes later Henry Wilbur watched her as she crossed the threshold of the room, bent on as dangerous an errand as could be imagined.

As the outer door closed the lawyer shut his door, and settled back in his chair."

"She's one in a million," he said. "I am amazed at her coolness and audacity."

Nina had long known of her brother's wrongs, as she chose to call them.

She had sympathized with him with all the intensity of her nature.

She was as faithful to him as it was possible to be, and his enemies were her enemies.

It was not generally known among Henry Wilbur's friends that he had a sister living.

She had married beneath her, and had led an unhappy and secluded life in the great city.

Forced to associate among vicious characters, she had slowly imbibed much of their nature, and her heart had become hardened to suffering as well as to crime.

But the lawyer was not thinking of this as he sat there.

His whole mind was taken up with thoughts of the excellent tool she made.

Presently he looked up and caught a reflection of himself in the mirror opposite.

His face was white.

He went to the window and stood there.

The street beneath the shutters was bustling with the life of a new day.

He watched the tide of humanity as it ebbed and flowed past his retreat.

Their unconcern maddened him.

They were not afraid to show their faces on the street.

There was a time when he would not have entered this part of the city, but now he was content to hide here, and to thank his stars that he was one of the denizens of Washington Street.

"Well, I had to do it," he muttered, half aloud. "It drove me mad to see the old miser raking in the money. It was half mine. What if I couldn't prove it? He knew. I helped him scuttle the vessels, and he promised me on his honor half the insurance money would go to me. Ah——"

With a cry of disgust he turned away from the window and went back to the table.

He opened his vest and took out a revolver hidden there.

This he carefully transferred to the side pocket of his coat.

"She may come back with a man at her heels," he muttered, eying the door anxiously.

He thought he heard a noise outside.

As he waited he was startled by a rapping on the door.

He snatched up his revolver and took a step forward.

He stopped near the portal and listened.

All at once he saw something white appear from under the door.

Some one was poking a letter into the room.

Henry Wilbur did not stir.

He preferred to get the word that way rather than open the door to some one he might not care to see.

When the missive was all the way in, he stooped and snatched it from the floor.

It was a brief letter, as he could tell from the feel of the paper, and he opened it with a wildly beating heart.

This is what he read:

"I have found him and send this back by a faithful boy. The next hour will see me successful. NINA."

Drawing a match from his pocket, he immediately burned the letter.

Then he went back to his chair and watched the door as if he expected to see another missive enter the room, but none came.

It was a period of fearful suspense to him.

When he could stand it no longer he went to the window again and took another survey of the street.

At that moment there were footsteps at the door, and a key turned in the lock.

It was Nina!

The woman's eyes glittered, and she came forward with a strange smile on her face.

"Did you get my message?" she asked, eagerly.

"Yes."

"I sent it because I didn't expect to come back here. I have tracked him down!" she exclaimed. "and at this moment he is on his way toward our trap."

"Don't be too sure of that."

"But I am sure of it," cried the woman, quickly. "Look at that."

And she held out a slip of paper on which something was written.

The lawyer seized it quickly.

"Dear Madam," it read, "I accept your offer and will be at the place appointed at nine o'clock.

"NICK CARTER."

"What have you done?" asked the lawyer, anxiously.

"I have made a deal with Red Moll, whereby I have the entire run of her place to-night. Nick Carter is to come there for a clew as to your whereabouts."

"And who did you represent yourself to be?"

"Valencia's sister," exclaimed the woman, with a note of triumph.

CHAPTER XI.

AT RED MOLL'S.

Nick Carter knew he had no easy work before him to run down his man.

The murderer had already proved himself a cunning and desperate rascal, who would hesitate at nothing to accomplish his escape.

Therefore, when morning came, he set to work cautiously to pick up the broken trail.

The famous detective is probably the greatest shadower living.

Given one end of a man's trail, it is next to impossible for the one shadowed to elude discovery.

A clever criminal may make the chase longer than another, but the result is always the same.

Henry Wilbur knew this.

Nick Carter had not been running down crooks in the great city and out of it so long for nothing.

So his plan to put the detective out of the way entirely was a wise one.

Only by doing this could he hope to escape capture.

And yet it was nearly noon before Nick got a trace of the man he was seeking.

An Italian peanut vender had seen a man, such as Nick described, run up Washington Street the night before, some time after two o'clock.

He himself had stood through the long hours of the night roasting peanuts at his stand and catching what little trade he could among the chance passers-by.

And now, after snatching but a few hours' sleep, he was again at his post.

Nick slipped a coin into his hand, and, after a moment's thought, bent his footsteps toward the hotel he had stopped at.

He was about to don one of his famous disguises.

As he passed through the office his eyes caught those of his young assistant, Patsy.

"Hello, my boy, what brings you here?" asked Nick, grasping his young aide's hand warmly. He had not seen him since his successful impersonation of Kitty Payson, the typewriter.

Patsy returned his chief's greeting, and then handed him a note.

"This came to the office just as I was starting out," said Patsy, "and it's the limit."

It was the letter Nina had sent.

"Deer, sur," it went, "ef yer want to no somthing important about the merderer of Valencia, see me this nite at Red Moll's on Watter st.

"VALENCIA'S SISTER."

"Who brought it, Patsy?" asked Nick, looking up.

"That kid over there," and the young detective pointed toward a seat in the corridor. "I made him come down with me."

"Tell him I'll send back an answer by him," said Nick, and he walked over to a desk and wrote a few words.

Placing the sheet in an envelope and sealing it, he gave it to the youngster.

Patsy had already tried to work out of the boy who the note came from, but the little fellow was as sly as a fox.

"You might see what he does with my answer," suggested Nick, as the messenger darted down the stairs.

Patsy followed him and saw him join a group of boys.

When they separated the youngster did not have the note, and there was no telling who did.

"Good work," laughed Patsy, in approval, "you win."

* * * * * * *

Red Moll was well-known to the denizens of Water Street.

She was in her place that night when she found herself approached by a woman who seemed to know her.

Red Moll led the way to a little room back of the bar.

"Is everything ready?" asked her visitor, as soon as they were alone.

For answer Red Moll went to one side of the room, which contained a table, and moved a chair nearer the wall.

Then, stepping to the table and looking up into the face that watched her, she touched a secret button underneath the leaf.

In an instant the floor opened beneath the chair, and it vanished.

It was all over in the twinkling of an eye, and the floor was back in place again.

"How do you like that?" said Red Moll. "It is all done, and no one knows how. The sewer is directly beneath us, and it carries off everything that goes down that hole."

The other woman, who was Nina, drew nearer and inspected the mechanism of the trap.

Then she stepped back with a look of satisfaction.

As Red Moll opened the door, and the two passed out again, a strange gleam could be seen in Nina's eyes.

Leaving the place, she returned in a few minutes with a companion.

It was a rather tall man, who wore a slouch hat and a heavy dark beard.

His eyes were black and piercing.

He followed her into the room she had recently inspected.

Opening a concealed door in the wall, he saw a small aperture.

It was scarcely large enough to hold a man, but he managed to squeeze into it.

Closing the door, the woman took a seat at the table and waited.

Ten minutes later Nick Carter went toward Red Moll's dive in Water Street.

He knew the place well.

Presently the woman behind the bar saw a strange man enter the room.

Nina saw him, too, and her pulse beat faster.

The man came directly toward the counter.

He leaned over the soaked board and said something in low tones to the woman there.

Red Moll turned from her work.

"I guess she is waiting for you in there," she said, nodding toward the room Nina was in, and she led him to the door.

As he entered Nina smiled and came toward him.

"Are you the party I was to meet here?" asked Nick Carter, for it was he.

"I am the party. Be seated."

The man, seeing but one empty chair, took it and looked across the table into the face on the other side.

As he did so, Red Moll went out and shut the door behind her.

She knew something out the ordinary was to be done.

So long, however, as she could not be held accountable, she did not care. And any noise that might be made would be drowned by the revelry outside.

She continued to supply the wants of her customers without the tremor of a hand.

At the very moment that the door clicked and left Nick alone with the woman, a window on the second story could have been seen to move slowly upward.

A figure had mounted to the roof of the adjoining house, which was a low one, and was at that moment climbing into Red Moll's.

This was Patsy, Nick's clever young assistant.

As he disappeared within the house he drew the window gently down again.

The room Nick was in was not very well lighted, and he could not see the gleam that filled the eyes of the woman there.

Nor could he note the position of the hidden door or see the eager face behind it.

"I happen to know that you are a detective," com-

menced the woman. "A lady in the house where I board has often heard of you, and she thought you could follow up my poor sister's murderer."

Nick's eyes had become accustomed to the dim light by this time.

His gaze never left the woman's face.

Patsy had given him an accurate description of his jailer in the East Side house.

One characteristic after another now told him, as he sat there, that Patsy's jailer and the person before him were one and the same.

"In the first place, let us understand each other," he said, coolly. "There need be no concealment here. I know who you are."

The woman started in her chair as if shot.

"In God's name, what will she do?" gasped the man behind the hidden door.

But Nina seemed equal to the occasion.

"You seem very positive you know me. Who do you think I am, and what do you think I invited you here for?"

As she spoke his hand rested lightly on the table and commenced to move carelessly along the edge.

"A cool woman like you would do anything," returned Nick. "You are very clever at some things, but as a jailer of young ladies you are a failure."

"Ha!" cried the woman, paling. "You are right, Nick Carter. Perhaps I shall be more of a success as a trap-setter."

As she spoke she pressed the button.

There was a sound which seemed to come from beneath the table.

The chair occupied by the detective sank instantly.

The floor had opened beneath Nick Carter.

Quick as a flash Nick seized the table, but that did not help him.

Then, as he dropped downward, his fingers caught on the edge of the trap.

At that moment a door burst open and out of the aperture dashed the man from the secret recess.

With a curse Henry Wilbur flew to the opening.

Seizing the remaining chair, he raised it above his head with the intention of bringing it down with all his might on top of the detective's head.

He poised himself for the blow.

Crack!

Nick's revolver had spoken.

The chair dropped from the man's grasp.

Nina and her brother fell back from the trap-door, but the revolver of Nick Carter covered them.

Suddenly Nina sprang to one side with the intention of pulling the table down on the detective's head.

"No, you don't," exclaimed a voice, and, glancing up at the top of the partition, Nina found herself looking into the barrels of two gleaming revolvers.

Patsy had arrived on the scene.

Meanwhile Nick was pulling himself out of the opening with the agility of an athlete.

Henry Wilbur, recovering himself with a desperate effort and in spite of the menacing weapons, held now by Patsy as well as Nick, hurled himself down upon Nick Carter. In his hand gleamed a murderous-looking knife.

There was a short struggle, but the murderer, already weakened by Nick's bullet, which had entered his shoulder, was soon forced to surrender.

Patsy, meanwhile, had climbed over the partition and had clamped the handcuffs on the woman.

She seemed completely cowed by the sudden turning of the tables against her and commenced to weep hysterically.

Red Moll was the most surprised woman on Water Street a moment later when the door opened and she saw the man and the woman in the hands of their victims.

Many lowering looks were directed at the two detectives, but the fact that one of them was Nick Carter flew from mouth to mouth and effectually prevented any demonstration.

Both Nick and Patsy still held their revolvers in their hands.

They marched their prisoners out quickly.

Within an hour they were behind prison bars at police headquarters.

CHAPTER XII.

THE END OF IT ALL.

The next day the newspapers told the story of Nick Carter's victory.

Kitty Payson read it with strange sensations.

Her own employer a murderer!

He must have written her the threatening note.

She sought for it in her trunk and drew it forth gingerly.

She shuddered as she opened it.

It was not written by her employer, of that she was certain.

Hurriedly putting on her hat, she placed the note in her pocketbook and started downtown.

Alighting near Nick Carter's office, Patsy having given her the address, she was soon in the presence of the great detective.

She was very much agitated, and wondered if her silence could cause her arrest.

Nick did not attempt to hide his annoyance when he learned how important a clew the typewriter had concealed.

But he could appreciate the girl's dread, so when she left she was in a penitent but greatly relieved state of mind.

In the meantime all efforts to get Henry Wilbur to confess his crime had been futile.

He defied the detectives to prove their case.

He was carefully searched, but he had taken good pains not to have any incriminating papers about his person.

After the officers had finished searching him Nick Carter took a hand at it.

He seemed to be looking for something particular.

He felt all over the lining of the man's coat.

Suddenly his thumb rested on a seam directly under the arm.

He quickly opened his penknife and slit the cloth.

Something shiny was exposed which rolled out and dropped to the floor.

It was a metal disk.

Picking it up with a cry of satisfaction, Nick Carter glanced at some characters on it.

They were: "Solano's, 11038."

Before the wondering officers could recover from their surprise, Nick Carter was out of the door and walking rapidly away to Solano's storage-rooms.

When he obtained the package the deposit check called for he saw that it was a mate to the one he had opened there two days before.

It contained the confession Valencia had spoken of.

It also had in it the slip of paper saying Henry Wilbur was to call on her that night.

The confession was a full one and cleared up every point on which Nick was still in the dark.

Old Marvin's real name was Frederick Marvin Craft, as the old envelopes had indicated.

Twenty-five years before he had been a rich ship owner in the South. He had several vessels that plied between New Orleans and Havana.

His purser was Henry Wilbur!

The confession went on to lay bare the full details of a plot Craft and Wilbur concocted to heavily insure the vessels and then have them suddenly founder.

Craft was to attend to the insuring and Wilbur was to see that the ships never reached their destinations.

The scheme worked like a charm.

Three of Mr. Craft's ships sunk within a year, all heavily insured.

One went down with thirty women and children on board, but the heartless scoundrels were unaffected by their fiendish work.

Wilbur himself took pains to get away on a boat he held in readiness long before each catastrophe occurred.

On account of the enormous insurance, an arrangement was made whereby the insurance companies agreed to pay the claims, in case of loss, by installments.

Craft, as owner of the vessels, was to get these payments.

But he made a secret agreement with Henry Wilbur to pay a fair proportion of them to him each year.

The payments were made faithfully for a year or two.

Then they stopped.

The wily ship owner realized that he held the cards all in his own hand and was not compelled to turn over any of his ill-gotten money to his accomplice.

Henry Wilbur threatened to expose him.

Mr. Craft told him to go ahead, if he dared.

Wilbur started out to do it, but his courage failed.

He was afraid of implicating himself as well as the ship owner.

Soon after Mr. Craft left New Orleans.

It was rumored that he had eloped with a pretty mulatto girl.

Though few knew it, the rumor was more than half true.

Instead of a mulatto, however, it was a young Italian woman named Valencia Sartoni.

The confession which contained all these details was made, so it stated, on Frederick Craft's deathbed.

It was evident, however, that he had recovered.

But Valencia had kept the confession.

When Henry Wilbur was confronted by the terrible chain of evidence which Nick Carter had found, he broke down and confessed.

He told how the ship owner and his wife had drifted to New York and after a short and unhappy married life together, had separated.

Meanwhile he himself turned lawyer and moved to New York.

A plot of revenge against the ship owner was even then smoldering in his heart.

He nursed it year by year, in spite of the fact that he could find no trace of the man he hated.

One day, less than a year before, he saw a man on Broadway that looked strangely like Mr. Craft.

He followed him, but lost him in the crowd.

The former ship owner had also seen Wilbur.

He knew Duffy, the water rat, and engaged him to keep his eye on the lawyer.

Despite the fact that he was living under another name, he was in daily dread of discovery by the man he had wronged.

It was quite by chance that Wilbur moved to The Rookery and took rooms so near the old ship owner.

For months old Mr. Craft avoided meeting the lawyer.

On the day preceding the fatal night of the murder the lawyer discovered his identity through Valencia, who had approached him with a proposition to sell the confession she held.

Telling his typewriter he was going out of town, he obtained a false beard.

He also had his mustache shaved, but bought another one to correspond with it.

When he knocked on the old man's door that night he was at once admitted.

It was evident Mr. Craft was expecting some one.

With a furious curse, the lawyer sprang upon his victim and dealt him the death blow.

Then, springing to the door, he quickly made his way out.

He was afraid to linger for fear of discovery.

Nick asked the prisoner about the unfinished note that had been found in Craft's desk.

But whoever it had been written by the lawyer knew nothing about it.

It was afterward learned that the dead man had made an appointment with Duffy, the dwarf, that night, but he had been unable to come.

As for the girl who was injured by the fire engine, it turned out that she was really Wilbur's niece, who had a room in the same boarding house with the lawyer.

Gordon, Wilbur's accomplice, was no relative of the lawyer, but was secretly in his employ.

He and Nina both were sentenced to several years in State's prison.

Henry Wilbur himself was tried and convicted of murder in the first degree.

He paid the penalty for his crime in the electric chair at Sing Sing.

Nick's achievement dumfounded the officers who had been vainly working on the case, and he was flooded with congratulations for his brilliant work from the commissioner of police down.

THE END.

The next issue, No. 354, will contain "Nick Carter From Peril to Peril; or, The Crime of the Stage Coach." The name well indicates the nature of the story, for, from the moment that the great detective was engaged on the case where the strange woman was found strangled in the coach, he was involved in danger after danger. It is a thrilling tale and absorbingly interesting from start to finish.

LIST OF PRIZE WINNERS.

Will each one who has won a prize kindly let us know what books he prefers?

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William Younkin, San Diego, Cal.
Arthur Deeelle, Woonsocket, R. I.
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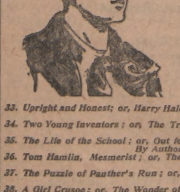

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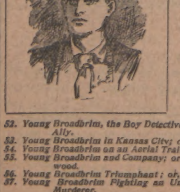

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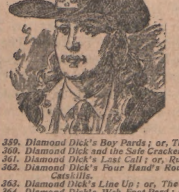

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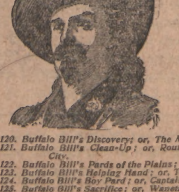

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